



AMERICAN ACADEMY OF NURSING

transforming health policy and practice through nursing knowledge

December 14, 2020

President-Elect Joseph R. Biden, Jr.
Vice President-Elect Kamala Harris
c/o The Honorable Ted Kaufman
Chair
Presidential Transition Team
1401 Constitution Avenue NW
Washington, DC 20230

Dear President-Elect Biden and Vice President-Elect Harris:

The American Academy of Nursing (Academy) congratulates you on your historic victory in the 2020 general election. We look forward to working with you and your Administration to tackle the current health and societal challenges facing our country and to create a framework for more equitable health in the future. The Academy's mission is to improve health and achieve health equity by impacting policy through nursing leadership, innovation, and science. Academy Fellows are inducted into the organization for their extraordinary contributions to improve health locally and globally. With more than 2,900 Fellows, the Academy represents nursing's most accomplished leaders who stand ready to provide your Administration our unique perspectives and collective expertise to further advance the health of the public. The Academy encourages your Administration to call on our Fellows for important health and social policy discussions over the course of your Presidency.

We want to commend the four pillars your incoming Administration highlights on the Build Back Better platform: COVID-19, economic recovery, racial equity, and climate change. These focus areas directly align with the work the Academy advanced in 2020, and in many ways, over our nearly 50-year history as an organization. We stand ready to be a trusted resource to your Administration through the [24 Expert Panels](#) comprised of innovative and seasoned healthcare leaders within our organization who can provide expert guidance on areas ranging from emerging infectious diseases and primary care to military & veterans' health, climate change, and maternal & infant health. The Academy's Fellows, such as former Acting Deputy Secretary of the Department of Health and Human Services Mary Wakefield, PhD, RN, FAAN, Rear Admiral Susan Orsega, MSN, FNP-BC, FAANP, FAAN, National Institute of Nursing Research Director Shannon N. Zenk, PhD, MPH, RN, FAAN, and Academy Honorary Fellows like Anthony Fauci, MD, Director of the National Institute of Allergy and Infectious Diseases, are some of the most trusted and visionary voices in health care. Academy Fellows are the nation's nurse leaders in government at all levels, hospital and health systems, policy, academic provosts, deans, and professors in the most prominent education institutions in this country as well as nurse scientists funded by the National Institutes of Health (NIH).

President-Elect Biden, your message, "Duty of Care," could not resonate more strongly with the nursing profession. The Academy's vision is healthy lives for all people, as we too are resolute in our duty of care. The Academy has a clear and distinct focus on health equity and uses this lens to advance policies and solutions within each of our three overarching policy priorities. In 2021-2022, the Academy will focus our work in the following three policy areas that we believe support your vision for health care:

- Advance Health Equity and Champion Wellness;
- Promote Innovation and Sustainability; and
- Reduce Patient, Provider, and System Burden.

Advance Health Equity & Champion Wellness

The Academy advances policies that protect and enrich safe and healthy communities. To truly improve health, we must expand access to quality care across the lifespan through novel approaches, aimed at eliminating racism and improving health equity. There must be a distinct focus on removing disparities and enhancing the care experience, especially for black and brown mothers, migrant populations, LGBTQ individuals, children, older adults, indigenous communities, and other vulnerable populations. Our communities must be protected from climate change and environmental toxins in order to safeguard the wellness and safety of every individual in any location during all health stages.

We hope your Administration will quickly address pressing health and social justice issues that the Academy has advanced over the last four years. The outcomes of these policy issues will have long-term health and well-being consequences for the affected vulnerable populations unless swift action is taken. Specifically, the Academy offers its support in your efforts to tackle the following priorities.

Affordable Care Act (ACA)

The Academy has a longstanding history of supporting the ACA and we are concerned that the recent proposed rules of your predecessor's Administration would undermine the health of vulnerable populations who rely on health programs administered by the Department of Health and Human Services (DHHS). We are encouraged with your promise to protect the ACA and further urge you to eliminate any regulations that undermine the intent of health programs administered by DHHS, including the recent final rule related to the health and health education programs under Section 1557¹ of the ACA. Additionally, the Academy remains alarmed by efforts to limit women's health and reproductive care. Preventive and wellness services as well as maternity care are two of the ten essential health benefits² outlined in the ACA and encourage the Administration ensure women continue to have full access to the health and reproductive care they need. We look forward to working with your Administration to improve and expand healthcare access and affordability for all Americans.

Children Separated at the Border

The Academy is on the record with our concerns^{3,4} about children separated at the border from their families. It is unconscionable that over 500 children have not yet been reunited with their loved ones. Studies support that forcibly separating children from their parents increases the likelihood of toxic stress levels for these children, and may have long-lasting negative effects on their health and psychological well-being. Toxic stress is the result of experiencing frequent and ongoing adverse events,⁵ particularly in the absence of protective behaviors. The Academy calls on the Administration to immediately deploy every possible measure to find the parents of the children who remain separated from them at the southern border and work to implement policies that protect families and children.

Climate Change

Climate change is a public emergency that threatens everyone's health and well-being, most especially our most vulnerable populations. The World Health Organization (WHO) estimates that 12.6 million preventable deaths per year can be attributed to environmental factors, all of which are exacerbated by climate change, and an additional 250,000 deaths per year are projected between 2030 and 2050.⁶ We applaud your commitment to addressing climate change and look forward to working with your Administration to address environmental justice as well as rejoining and strengthening the 2015 Paris

Agreement on climate change mitigation. As John Kerry, the Special Presidential Envoy for Climate launches his work, please consider engaging Academy experts to provide nursing science and evidence.

Maternal Health and Infant Health

The Academy pledges its continued commitment to addressing the causes, consequences, and solutions to combat two prominent issues related to maternal and infant health (MIH): increased rates of maternal mortality and morbidity as well as preterm births (PTBs) within the United States, and especially among Black mothers. Recent efforts to improve MIH and to address the health and racial disparities in this area remain insufficient. Black mothers remain the primary group at risk for maternal and infant mortality as well as PTBs. These statistics will only improve significantly when better access to quality, equitable health care is achieved.

Coronavirus (COVID-19)

In light of the devastating toll COVID-19 has had on the public, we must rebuild the nation's public health infrastructure, target vaccine-preventable diseases, and improve access to mental health care services. Throughout this pandemic, nurses have been on the front lines fearlessly leading the way in patient care, community education to reduce exposure risk, the coordination of testing, as well as other vital public health activities necessary to slow the spread of COVID-19. Nurses have the expertise and leadership skills essential to the fight against COVID-19 and the Academy has made recommendations on how to prepare for future pandemics and public health emergencies.⁷ The Academy is supportive of your efforts and look forward to working with your Administration to ensure we protect our most vulnerable populations; support nurses and healthcare systems; and increase access to testing as well as a vaccine to end this pandemic.

Deferred Action for Childhood Arrivals (DACA)

The Academy is pleased you will issue an Executive Order early in your Administration to reinstate the DACA program. DACA recipients should not be punished for arriving in the country through no fault of their own and deserve to have full access, free of discrimination, to health care, education, and job opportunities in order to be the productive members of our society they wish to be. These individuals have contributed to the health industry, including during the current COVID-19 pandemic, and deserve for their efforts to be acknowledged.

Gun Violence

For many years, our organization has consistently called for action on gun violence.^{8,9} The evidence is clear that gun violence affects the public's health broadly.¹⁰ The Academy continues to support policy solutions such as the expansion of background checks as well as increased funding for the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention's (CDC) National Center for Injury Prevention and Control. Your Administration can make significant strides in both of these areas to decrease gun violence in our society and our expert nurse researchers and leaders stand with your efforts to do so.

Rejoin the World Health Organization (WHO)

Withdrawing from the WHO was detrimental to the health of the nation and the world. As you know, our continued involvement in the WHO is vital, especially as the COVID-19 pandemic worsens and new global health threats emerge. Separating the United States from this important work will not only lead to more suffering from COVID-19, but also diminish our global efforts to prevent communicable diseases, prepare for public health emergencies, collect necessary data, and ensure primary care is accessible. The Academy calls on you to immediately reverse this decision.

Military Sexual Trauma

In order to keep our country secure, we must also secure the safety and well-being of our armed forces.

Military sexual trauma is a continuing and urgent issue among military service members. Individuals must be able to report acts of violence, sexual assault, and harassment without fear of retribution. More must be done to combat the unacceptable actions and lack of appropriate measure to address the existing culture. The Academy encourages sufficient resources and multipronged approaches be immediately employed for the prevention of, intervention in, and recovery from military sexual trauma.

Promote Innovation & Sustainability

Now more than ever, the promotion of innovation and sustainability is vital in order to eliminate the systemic racism that contributes to health inequity. The Academy believes policy modernizations that are sustainable and effective over time must be adopted. This includes implementing technologies, treatments, and models of care as well as policies that recognize providers for their expertise, education, and clinical training to amplify patient choice. The Academy believes competition in the healthcare provider market increases access and reduces cost while improving quality. The Academy looks forward to working with your Administration to advance telehealth, payment reform, full practice authority, increase investments in research and scientific careers, ensure financial recovery and resiliency of health providers, as well as other innovative and successful solutions, such as the models of care recognized by the Academy's [Edge Runners program](#).

Full Practice Authority

The Academy believes patients should have full access to registered nurse (RN) and Advanced Practice Registered Nurse¹¹ (APRN) providers to improve the availability of cost-effective, patient-centered care, consistent with the 2010 Institute of Medicine (now the National Academy of Medicine [NAM]) report, *The Future of Nursing: Leading Change, Advancing Health*, which called for the elimination of regulatory barriers that prevent APRNs from practicing to their full scope.¹² Further, it outlines several paths by which patient access to care may be expanded, quality preserved or improved, and costs controlled through greater use of APRNs. The NAM report specifically recommends that, "advanced practice registered nurses should be able to practice to the full extent of their education and training." The Academy firmly supports this recommendation but, while important steps toward that goal have been taken at both federal and state levels, barriers to full practice authority still remain. We are encouraged with efforts to implement full practice authority at the federal level in response to the COVID-19 pandemic and encourage your Administration to ensure these efforts to expand access remain after the pandemic has subsided.

Research Funding

Critical to the Academy's mission is the necessary evidence that will promote health and wellness now and in the future. As the scientific voice for the Academy, the Council for the Advancement of Nursing Science (CANS) formulates and advances research, scientific training, and career development within the profession. In the effort to promote better health, CANS enhances communication among nurse scientists and the public to develop, disseminate, and utilize nursing research to address top health issues. The Academy and CANS believes to truly improve health, policies and research must look at ways to expand access to quality care through novel approaches, aimed at eliminating health inequality. Innovation in the health care industry, as well as emerging practices, must be tested and advanced for heightened impact and improved outcomes.

The Academy and CANS support increased funding for basic, biomedical, and behavioral science research. The National Institutes of Health (NIH) needs additional resources, both intramural and extramural, to ensure their research capacity does not drop during the pandemic. Both organizations remain concerned about the impact of the disruption of funds for pre-COVID research projects that has occurred as priorities have shifted. To that end, the Academy and CANS encourage the Administration to increase funding at the NIH, CDC, and other federal research programs. It is important to ensure that

funding for federal research and research at academic and private institutions for COVID-19 supplement and not supplant current research funding.

Reduce Patient, Provider, & System Burden

The COVID-19 pandemic has shown the courageous dedication of nurses to ensure high quality care for all individuals, yet they themselves have experienced great moral, emotional, ethical, and physical distress. It is well known that patient health is linked to the well-being of their clinicians. We encourage your Administration to champion policies that provide patients, providers, and systems, the ability to give and receive optimal care. The Academy is eager to work with your Administration to advance policy solutions supportive of the providers and systems within the care team, health literacy, and optimizing work environments so the health care system can take care of its workforce. Retention among nursing positions has been a well-documented grievance and the Academy is concerned this will be further exacerbated in the aftermath of the pandemic.

As a science-based organization, the Academy continues to be concerned with the misinformation circulating about the COVID-19 pandemic related to the spread of the virus, and the vaccine. As nurses, our ethical code and professional obligation is to provide clear, unbiased education and information based on the latest research and science. Ultimately, it is incumbent upon our profession to elevate the nation's health literacy. As the DHHS swiftly advances public campaign programs to combat the spread of misinformation, the Academy looks forward to working with your Administration to be a trusted source of information and request that you look to nurses to help be a voice for your Administration's efforts within their respective communities.

Again, congratulations on your election. The Academy and our Fellows are eager to support you and your Administration with resources and expertise to craft policy solutions that ensures healthy lives for all. If you have any questions or need additional information, please feel free to contact the Academy's Chief Executive Officer, Suzanne Miyamoto at smiyamoto@aannet.org or the Academy's Senior Director of Policy, Christine Murphy, at cmurphy@aannet.org.

Sincerely,



Eileen Sullivan-Marx, PhD, RN, FAAN
President

¹ American Academy of Nursing. (2020, August 18). *American Academy of Nursing comments to the US Department of Health and Human Services (HHS) final rule "Nondiscrimination in Health and Health Education Programs or Activities."* [www.aannet.org](https://higherlogicdownload.s3.amazonaws.com/AANNET/c8a8da9e-918c-4dae-b0c6-6d630c46007f/UploadedImages/FINAL_HHS_Final_Rule_Health_Nondiscrimination.pdf).

https://higherlogicdownload.s3.amazonaws.com/AANNET/c8a8da9e-918c-4dae-b0c6-6d630c46007f/UploadedImages/FINAL_HHS_Final_Rule_Health_Nondiscrimination.pdf

² *Information on Essential Health Benefits (EHB) Benchmark Plans | CMS.* (n.d.). <https://www.cms.gov/ccio/resources/data-resources/ehb>.

³ American Academy of Nursing. (2018, June 19). *American Academy of Nursing Releases Statement on Separation of Families at the U.S. Border* [Press release]. https://higherlogicdownload.s3.amazonaws.com/AANNET/c8a8da9e-918c-4dae-b0c6-6d630c46007f/UploadedImages/docs/Press%20Releases/2018/2018-Academy_Statement_on_Separation_of_Children-Parents_at_Border-B.pdf

⁴ American Academy of Nursing & American Nurses Association. (2019, February 8). *Letter to the House Energy and Commerce Oversight and Investigations Subcommittee regarding the conditions and treatment of immigrants at our southern border.*

[www.aannet.org](https://higherlogicdownload.s3.amazonaws.com/AANNET/c8a8da9e-918c-4dae-b0c6-6d630c46007f/UploadedImages/AAN_ANA_Joint_Statement_on_Child_Separation.pdf). https://higherlogicdownload.s3.amazonaws.com/AANNET/c8a8da9e-918c-4dae-b0c6-6d630c46007f/UploadedImages/AAN_ANA_Joint_Statement_on_Child_Separation.pdf

⁵ Mason, D. J. (2014). Toxic stress in childhood: Why we all should be concerned. *Nursing Outlook*, 62(6), 382–383. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.outlook.2014.09.001>

⁶ World Health Organization. (2017, November 11). *Fifth Global Climate and Health Summit.* <https://www.who.int/globalchange/mediacentre/news/cop23-23-key-messages/en/>

⁷ American Academy of Nursing. (2020, June 26). *American Academy of Nursing letter to the Senate Health, Education, Labor, and Pensions (HELP) Committee with recommendations on how the country should prepare for the next pandemic*. Www.Aannet.Org. https://higherlogicdownload.s3.amazonaws.com/AANNET/c8a8da9e-918c-4dae-b0c6-6d630c46007f/UploadedImages/FINAL_AAN_HELP_Committee_Pandemic_Response.pdf

⁸ American Academy of Nursing. (2019, September 26). *American Academy of Nursing Supports Efforts to Reduce Gun Violence* [Press release]. https://higherlogicdownload.s3.amazonaws.com/AANNET/c8a8da9e-918c-4dae-b0c6-6d630c46007f/UploadedImages/Press_Release_American_Academy_of_Nursing_Supports_Efforts_to_Reduce_Gun_Violence.pdf

⁹ American Academy of Nursing. (2019a, August 5). *Academy sent a letter to Congressional leadership calling on them to act to prevent future gun violence*. www.aannet.org. https://higherlogicdownload.s3.amazonaws.com/AANNET/c8a8da9e-918c-4dae-b0c6-6d630c46007f/UploadedImages/Academy_Letter_to_Address_Gun_Violence_August_2019.pdf

¹⁰ Gonzalez-Guarda, R. M., Dowdell, E. B., Marino, M. A., Anderson, J. C., & Laughon, K. (2018). American Academy of Nursing on policy: Recommendations in response to mass shootings. *Nursing Outlook*, 66(3), 333-336. doi:10.1016/j.outlook.2018.04.003.

¹¹ APRNs include certified nurse-midwives (CNMs), certified registered nurse anesthetists (CRNAs), clinical nurse specialists (CNSs) and nurse practitioners (NPs).

¹² National Academy of Medicine. (2011). *The Future of Nursing: Leading Change, Advancing Health*. Washington, DC: The National Academies Press. <https://doi.org/10.17226/12956>.